

## CPYRIGHT Public Eye and Private Judgment

The CIA's first open news conference is said to have been authorized by President Johnson. We doubt the President thought the matter through.

His impulse was a good one. The public ought to understand what has happened to the Soviet growth rate on which newly compiled information is at hand. The new low rate is controversial but decisions are being made because of it. Public debate can help clarify whether the rate has been marked down too far because of the Soviet farm failures.

In general, the more information the public can be given the better it is.

But there was a hook in this press conference bait. The State Department and the White House are currently trying to persuade the NATO allies that they can help feed Soviet or Chinese citizens with food, for humanitarian reasons, but should not help the hard-pressed Communist economies. The new low growth estimate encourages the United States' argument that economic pressure on the Soviet Union, however painful to the West in terms of renouncing trade opportunities, will effectively help keep communism under restraint.

Leave the dispute itself to one side. The point we wish to make here is that the CIA press conference was aimed consciously at influencing American and world opinion, not on a matter of fact but

of judgment and policymaking. This ought not to be a CIA function. However good its staffs of economists and political analysts—we have no easy way to judge—the last function an intelligence gathering organization should undertake is to shape public opinion and make policy. Such objectivity as it has would rapidly corrode.

Allen Dulles used to make the CIA reasonably available to responsible inquiries from press and public at many levels. He used to make occasional speeches based on intelligence information. But except for the carefully chosen speeches, material from this quarter was to be used without attribution. It melted into the large stream of information from many sources. This system worked quite well considering there is no ideal way to conduct clandestine functions within an open society, and that it is hard to separate different kinds of intelligence.

We recommend a return to the Allen Dulles formula. There are empires enough in Washington policymaking. Many sources are pouring out purported information, too often for their own purposes. Let's not turn the overseas intelligence agency into another, however great the desire to inform or persuade. The White House, the State and Defense Departments, can release material important to explain decisions of foreign policy, where it is in the public interest.